

Utopia, Palestine, and partition: Herbert Samuel's *An Unknown Land* (1942)

Finn Fordham, University of London

Abstract

This article examines the relation between, on the one hand, 'An Unknown Land', a moderately popular Utopian fiction written by the Jewish Liberal politician, Herbert Samuel, and, on the other, Samuel's involvement in British policy towards Palestine from World War I to the time of the Arab Uprising (1936–1939). Samuel had been the first High Commissioner of Palestine, from 1922 to 1925 under the British Mandate, and had sympathies with Zionism. In the late 1930s, he resisted (successfully) the various plans proposed to partition Palestine into Jewish, Muslim and specifically British areas. His resistance to partition, however, sits oddly alongside the fiction, in which the threat of sectarian civil war in Utopia is assuaged through a voluntary act of partition, agreed by all parties. It argues that the contradiction does not signal any irony or satire against the condition of Utopia on Samuel's part, but represents both a wish-fulfilment and Samuel's Imperialist political unconscious in which Zionism is a means to an Imperialist end, and is justified as a Utopian triumph of modernity over tradition.

Keywords

Utopia

Imperialism

Liberalism

Palestine

Zionism

Partition

satire

political unconscious

An Unknown Land – a moderately popular Utopian fiction when it came out in 1942 – is now an almost entirely unknown book. Its author, Herbert Louis Samuel, then a 66-year-old Liberal member of the House of Lords, Viscount of Mount Carmel and Toxteth, had undertaken its composition in 1937, shortly after his book of popular philosophy, *Belief and Action*, whose sales would eventually reach roughly 100,000 – now also forgotten – had come out (Huneidi 2001: 80; Brown 2005: 924). The composition of *An Unknown Land* was interrupted by the outbreak of war, its appearance delayed by the war economy, and its early success was dampened by a culture hamstrung by wartime (Wasserstein 1992: 375). Its longer-term reception was further hobbled by the jaundiced disillusionment of post-war Britain. The distant unreality of Samuel’s Utopia, the complacency of its inhabitants, their mild preachings about the spiritual value of technology, their perpetual leisure, and the bland suburbia of its 15-mph streets were intolerable for the inhabitants of a country who would soon encounter and embrace the reflection of that country, as offered by Orwell in *1984* (1949), as ‘Airstrip One’. As we will see, Orwell had been quick to diagnose the dullness of the work and Utopias in the only negative review of the work, but would nevertheless, also quietly borrow some of the techniques of its satire.

The scene is being set in this way not to make a plea for the restoration of a forgotten classic, or for the re-evaluation of a disregarded middlebrow masterpiece. This article will not be thinking through questions of cultural value: of how to judge

the ephemerally popular versus the enduringly canonical, or the ephemerally canonical versus the enduringly popular. The book in question was never popular for a mass audience nor canonical for an elite one, and by itself the book is just too dull: the writing is harmless enough, but what little drama there might be (a shipwreck, mild threat) is mechanically set up to conform with perceived demands of the genre. This introduction serves, rather, to lay the ground for an examination of the book in a specific but highly relevant context: the fraught administration of British Mandated Palestine between the World Wars. It is this historical context, fundamental to the history of the formation of Israel, that, in cultural history at least, deserves, more than the book by itself, to be recovered and receive closer attention. Early reviewers, especially the critical Orwell, missed a trick by not setting the discourse of Samuel's Utopia alongside the events unfolding in Palestine, and British policy with respect to them. These contexts and Samuel's roles in them not only make the book worth attending to, but they make the dullness of the book itself interesting. If Walter Benjamin's famous paradox is true, that

cultural treasures [...] have an origin which [one] cannot contemplate without horror. They owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great minds and talents who have created them, but also to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries. There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. (Benjamin, 1969: 256-7)

then Dystopias are essential in the production of Utopias, and there is no condition of a dull enduring peace that is not 'at the same time' a condition of a violent anxiety flaring up.

So rather than a ‘recovery’, this article is a ‘reframing’, a new installation of an overlooked object such that its display increases and transforms its significance. To achieve the effects of recontextualization, such cultural history traditionally borrows from the practice of collage or bricolage. New Historicism knew that the recontextualizations of collaged elements, with no specially established connection between the elements in question, could give new meanings to both shop-soiled classics and to faded ephemera. The problem was the arbitrariness of the relation. But in the case in question, the relation of text and context is far from arbitrary. The British Mandate is an essential context to the book because the author of *An Unknown Land* had been the first High Commissioner of Palestine from 1922 to 1925. And in 1937, shortly after he had entered the House of Lords, Samuel was, moreover, involved in the heated debates that followed on from the Peel Commission, which had been in turn a response to the crisis in Palestine known as the Arab Uprising (1936–1939). The Commission had proposed a complex partition of Palestine in order to separate Jewish and Muslim populations, something Samuel vehemently opposed. Further details of Samuel and his relation to Zionism will emerge below, but this is enough context to establish the terms of engagement in this article, especially now that the term ‘partition’ has appeared.

Partition shadows Utopias, which depend on exclusions and on borders, by virtue of which the excluded can be spatially disposed of. The establishment and protection of borders – continuous acts of partition – are essential to the structures and the prosperity of Utopia. The more or less visible history of their instantiation gives the peaceful perfection of Utopias the lie. The relation to this actual administrative problem among surveyors of Utopias varies from text to text, as from place to place (or indeed ‘no-place’ to ‘no-place’). The surveyors might, for instance, be aware of

the problem, but conceal their knowledge so as to produce doubts about their irony or satiric intent – as is the case with Thomas More’s original *Utopia*. They might be fully aware of it, and might display the issue openly, so that Utopia is then clearly satirized into its Dystopian other, as is the case with Aldous Huxley’s 1932 *Brave New World*. They might overcome the problem, and reduce satirizing the Utopian space to zero, so as to present sincerely a New ‘One World’ Order – as is the case of H. G. Wells’s 1933 *Shape of Things to Come*. Or, finally, they do not present partition or exclusion as a problem as such, since the processes unfold through free choice, and both sides agree to the separation and partition – this is the case in Samuel’s *An Unknown Land*. These four alternatives might be seen as the realist, the pessimist, the optimist and the liberal. Samuel’s liberal option combines Wellsian faith and optimism in human common sense with a degree of More’s indeterminacy. But the indeterminacy does not come about by virtue of concealing knowledge of the problem, but rather through not obviously knowing that a problem is presenting itself.

As will become clear, *An Unknown Land* was an expression of an individual who, both within and beyond the production of his fiction, was having to negotiate incompatible and competing discourses, all of which had both pragmatic and Utopian forms. As well as Zionism, Arab Nationalism and Imperialism – of both Liberal and Conservative strands – Samuel, through his political upbringing, was aware of Fabianism and Wellsian technocracticism. And like everyone else he was aware of Communism and Fascism.

The coincidence of his production of a fiction in the Utopian genre with inside knowledge of Zionism, experience of administering Mandated Palestine, and his responses to the crisis in Palestine from 1936 onwards produces an ideal place to examine the troubled relations between Zionism and Utopia, or ‘Jewtopia’ as Israel

Zangwill called it in a letter to H. G. Wells (Wells 1998: 87). Samuel being a politician first and a writer second makes this, moreover, a special instance for exploring the perennial critical obsession with the relations between literature and the political, between the practice of fiction and the praxis of politics. These seem to be deeply entwined here, and their entanglement raises a number of questions – some already hinted at: what might the relations between Samuel's imagined Utopia and the realpolitik of the late 1930s be? Does this framing shine a light, though limited, on Jewish culture or on the condition of Jewry at a particular moment in Britain and Europe, already sliding towards catastrophe? As an expression of Utopia from a Jewish perspective prior to the founding of Israel, how does it compare with such expressions afterwards? What are the relations between Utopias and the issue of Partition? Utopia always appears to have achieved a one-state solution. But can one ever consider a state in isolation from other states? And what of irony, and sincerity – another perennial problem for the studies of Utopias?

An Unknown Land absorbs the wishful thinking of Zionism and of Liberal Imperialism and translates this thinking into Utopian fiction. Zionism had already managed to translate one of its Utopian fictions (Herzl's *Altneuland* of 1902) into actuality. *Altneuland* was translated immediately into Hebrew and given the name 'Tel Aviv' by its translator Nahum Sokolov. This title was then adopted as the name of a new Jewish settlement in Palestine founded in 1909. Wish fulfilment is a common feature of the dreams that Utopian literature conjure, and in *An Unknown Land* a wish to escape from the nightmare of contemporary history is fulfilled. What is striking about this instance is the proximity of *An Unknown Land* to what may be thought to lie in the dark heart of Utopian dreams: imperial fantasies of state building, the hierarchical arrangement of populations, acts of partition.

Herbert Samuel

Samuel is a remarkable figure, remembered now less as a writer than as a major statesman of Liberal politics in the twentieth century: chief architect of Liberal policy in the early 1900s; an opponent of the 1905 Alien's Act (Glover 2004: 187); the first Jew in the cabinet (Disraeli, Samuel would himself insist, does not count since he was a convert [1945: 139]); an acquaintance of the Webbs, H. G. Wells and, later, T. S. Eliot; and a regular contributor to the popular BBC discussion programme in the 1940s and 1950s, the 'Brains Trust'.

By 1914, Samuel was familiar with several varieties of Zionism, having been an acquaintance of Zangwill and others (Laqueur 1972: 183). Seeing the likely collapse of the Ottoman Empire, he was the first politician to understand that the chances of establishing a Jewish homeland in Palestine were real. He met with the foreign secretary, Sir Edward Grey, three months after World War I had broken out. In his record of the meeting a strong Utopian idealism appeared with Zionist underpinnings:

If a Jewish State were established in Palestine it might become the centre of a new culture. The Jewish brain is rather a remarkable thing, and under national auspices, the state might become a fountain of enlightenment and a source of a great literature and art and development of science.

He is practical too: it would be advantageous for the British:

I thought that British influence ought to play a considerable part in the formation of such a state; because the geographical situation of Palestine, and especially its proximity to Egypt, would render its goodwill to England a matter of importance to the British Empire. (Samuel 1945: 140–41)

He soon met up with the Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann and encouraged him to be ‘less modest in his demands’. Weizmann reported his reply to Samuel: ‘if I were a religious jew, I should think the Messianic times were near’ (Laqueur 1972: 182). Asquith, the Prime Minister, however, believed the whole idea was a non-starter. But when he fell from power at the end of 1916, with Balfour coming in as Foreign Secretary, the plan was looked on much more favourably, and soon adopted. During the subsequent upheavals of World War I, Samuel became the bridge between Zionist Utopianism and imperialist pragmatism.

Samuel lobbied for Zionism at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. Without Samuel’s lobbying the Balfour declaration itself might never have been declared. As the first High Commissioner of Palestine, Samuel wrote, in 1922, the first official interpretation of Balfour’s intentionally vague declaration. Samuel became the administrator of a powerful dream, as Sahar Huneidi has shown (Huneidi 2001: 230-237). He helped turn a nationalist and uneasily religious Utopian ideology into the servant of the British Empire, assisting the colonial agenda and its Middle Eastern interests. Eventually, as the master grew old and infirm, the servant outgrew and turned on this master.

By the mid-1930s, Samuel was long out of Palestine; but his experience meant he remained a key player in policy formation and negotiations with concerned parties. He gave evidence to the Peel Commission which was set up

after the start of the Arab uprising. And in 1937 he argued passionately in the House of Lords against its resulting recommendations: ‘that the little country should be divided into three separate states – one Arab, one Jewish, and one British under mandate’ (Samuel 1942: 283). It was at this time that Samuel began to relieve the pressure of history upon him, by turning to the pleasures of an imaginary island.

An Unknown Land

Samuel’s novel was a sequel to both his own book of philosophy, *Action and Belief*, and also to Francis Bacon’s unfinished *New Atlantis*. It took up the latter’s island of Bensalem, and deployed the conceit of proving that Bacon’s island actually existed. The name of Bacon’s island is noteworthy. It resembles ‘Jerusalem’, the city of peace (*shalom*), which is a symbol for the city at the heart of God’s final reign over the earth. But as ‘Ben Shalom’, Bensalem is more like the ‘son of peace’, introducing a Messianic idea. Bacon’s Utopia had its roots in the Crusader’s dream of a Christian Jerusalem, an appropriation of the Old Testament’s idea of ‘the promised land’.

The narrator, an explorer, sets sail to find Bacon’s island in 1936. But after many months at sea – the tale being cast in the classic mould – there is a severe storm and a shipwreck. The wreck takes place on an island that, by chance, turns out to be a neighbour of Bensalem; the narrator is rescued and soon settles in the mainland’s city of Renfusa, now advanced way beyond the vision of Bacon’s traveller, whose account turns out to have been inaccurate in any case. Samuel’s narrator stays there for three seasons, observes its ways and becomes devoted to them. The inhabitants wear colourful versions of seventeenth-century puritan garb, and are *fin de siècle* idealists: down on carbon fuels and smoking (like our narrator), they have abundant nuclear

and tidal energy and so the sky is always clear and the air pure; there are neither wages nor money, no servants (no human servants at any rate) nor any class system, no private ownership, no crime, no armed forces, no penal system, no prisons. They have cured cancer. Because everyone has what they want, there is no greed. No one works more than nine hours a week, but no one is idle. They are all cultured and intelligent. There is no religion, but they are spiritual, since mind is life – Samuel developing some Spinozist ideas from his 1937 book *Belief and Action*. They have developed telepathic powers: they carefully ensure their isolation from the rest of the world (public ownership must have its limits), while sending visitors to spy and cherry-pick the rest of humanity's latest and best developments in science. The map (fig. 1) shows a main island, but also several smaller islands to the south: these are, as we will see, Utopia's other, its dark underbelly, usefully disconnected by a strait of water, a natural border. The people are uniformly smug. At the end of the book, the narrator justifies the genre to his anxious audience of 1942 in dull and worthy terms:

In a troubled, anxious and dangerous age, even a mere Utopia may help to lessen pessimism and to encourage that untiring effort which alone can mitigate existing evils and ward off further dangers. (Samuel 1942: 210)

This raises the already mentioned problem of irony, and the sincerity of this framing – which I will return to.

Critical response

An Unknown Land was widely and, generally, well reviewed. There had been a taste for ‘war aims’, for Utopian thinking prophecyng post-war reconstruction,

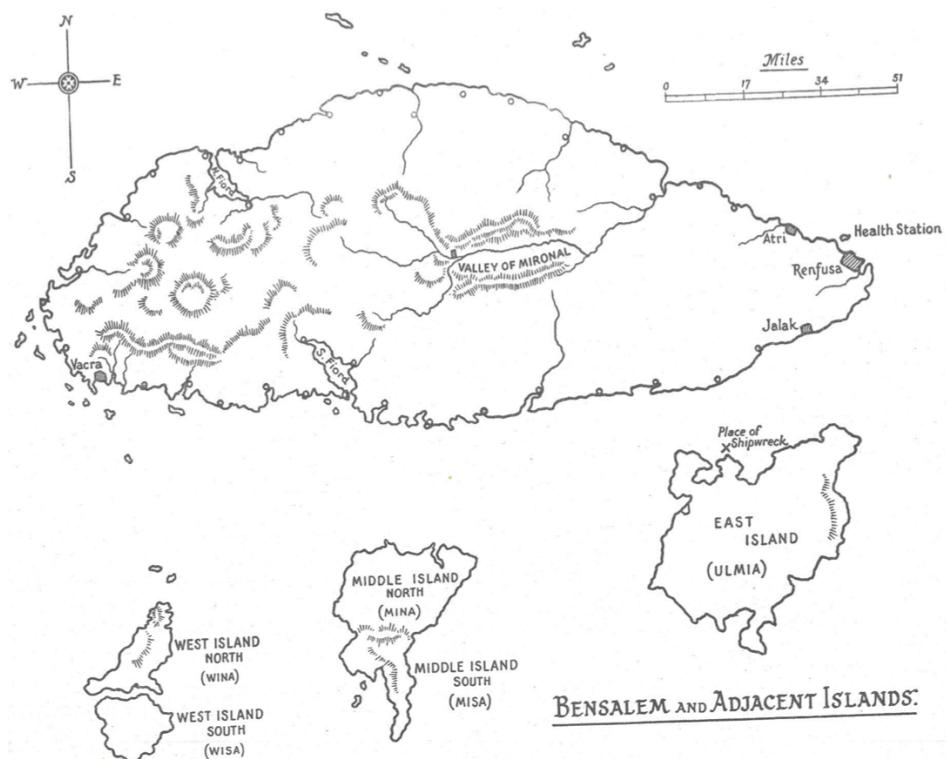


Fig. 1: Map of Bensalem in *An Unknown Land*

with public ownership central to the forms it took. But the book's mid- to long-term reception was badly hit – either by appearing when it did, or by being too smug and ponderous. Wasserstein, Samuel's political biographer, concludes about his efforts to be a man of letters and polymath, that:

He liked to think of himself as a modern version of Francis Bacon: But Samuel was not really a polymath: his analytic intelligence was constrained by a middlebrow aesthetic and by an imagination that... seldom rose beyond the pedestrian. (1992: 402)

He was certainly no modernist, but the work is underestimated – being more lucid and fluent than H. G. Wells's turgid visions in *Shape of Things to Come*. Orwell, as mentioned, diagnosed, in the least favourable of the reviews, a weakness that he ascribed to the genre as a whole:

Why is it that such ‘ideal’ conditions as these [in Bensalem] are always so profoundly unappetising to read about? One is driven to conclude that fully human life is not thinkable without a considerable intermixture of evil. [...] [H]umour and the sense of fun [...] have no place in Utopia. (Orwell [1942] 1998: 254)

The ineradicable quality of evil in human life is noteworthy for Orwell's coming dystopia, *1984* (1949). Orwell scolds Samuel for not having learnt from reading Swift more carefully. In the latter's ‘Land of the Houyhnhnms... a note of melancholy intrudes and the narrative even becomes boring’ (Orwell [1942] 1998: 254). Orwell may be right, but Samuel was aware of the risk: the narrator informs the Bensals that his readers will find Bensal ‘lives are too placid, too virtuous... too dull’ (Samuel 1942: 211). The sailors, with whom the narrator had travelled, agree and prefer life on the relatively barbaric islands to the south. The Bensals wish that the West in general would risk living less dangerously, citing the negative influence of Nietzsche in Germany.

Orwell will, however, owe more to Samuel than he can know at this time. Samuel included a satire of Soviet Russia, Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy through the islands known as Ulmia (the ‘Union of Logical Materialist Idealists’), Mina and Misa, projecting features that would later be made more famous by Orwell. In

Mina, government propaganda declares, ‘Whatever our Government says is true; even when false...’ (Samuel 1942: 177). The narrator also notes that

Certain words have been struck out altogether. ‘Freedom’, ‘justice’, ‘kindness’ and ‘mercy’ must never be used. (Samuel 1942: 177)

This prefigures an identical principle of linguistic elimination in Orwell’s *1984* (1949), where ‘Newspeak’ is a sign of totalitarianism. And in its context, this prescience, on Samuel’s part, is remarkable.

Bensalem and sectarianism

The existence of these islands leads to the question of how their societies developed – why they don’t share in Bensalem’s prosperity. Samuel is at pains to make his Utopia a secular and scientific, but nevertheless spiritual place, in which classic historical tensions – between, say, Jews and Christians – have been resolved. Our narrator learns that ‘Christianity and Judaism are approximating [...] to a single fundamental faith’ (Samuel 1942 :128). Nevertheless, a form of sectarianism has unfolded in Bensalem long before the arrival of the narrator, but not through religious or ethnic differences. The difference is over an issue of medical ethics, a material concern that looks Swiftian. That is, the Bensals discover how natural intelligence can be enhanced mechanistically, using vivisective experiments that help the brain expand. After the birth of a large-headed boy who turns out to be highly intelligent, the Bensals begin experimenting with extending skull size, first on babies, and then on apes. ‘At last the right way was found – the method of suction, applied gently and at intervals through what we call the ‘vacuum-cup’ (Samuel 1942 : 41). The apes become their semi-

intelligent servants (solving the problem of intelligent people having to do all the menial tasks). This process is given the name ‘suturization’. The resulting ballooned foreheads are concealed under turbans, so that when they travel abroad, instead of being mistaken for scary aliens, they are mistaken for Sikhs. This horrifying process is essential to the increasing success of Bensalem society. The narrator seems to admire everything in Bensalem, including this. There is no obvious irony directed at these citizens, especially given what happened next.

When mass suturization was first promoted, many on Bensalem chose not to have their children treated in this way. This is a plausible resistance: one might think of MMR vaccination as an analogy. They then grew up at a disadvantage. As the narrator notes, this ‘divided [the population] into what were in effect two separate races’, the Small-Heads League and the rest (surely a nod to Swift). This in turn led to sectarian conflict: to ‘acts of violence... rioting ... attacks... buildings burnt down... the disturbances threatened to grow into civil war’ (Samuel 1942: 44). We should remember that this section of the book was being written in the wake of the second phase of the Arab uprising in Palestine, in 1937. In a crucial Lords debate held in 1937 in response to the Peel Commission, Samuel described this uprising as follows:

an excitable population, eagerly ready to listen to, and equally eager to welcome, any rumours, went up in flames, and there were horrible massacres, much blood shed on one side, and in the suppression of the revolt on the other side; and ever since then things have gone from bad to worse. (Hansard: HL Deb 20th July 1937, vol 106, col 559)

The solution to the civil war in Bensalem has all the implausibly simple rationality of many Imperialist and Utopian dreams:

At last the leaders of the Small-heads League made a proposal, which proved equally acceptable to both sides. The proposal was that the Small-heads should migrate in a body to the Islands, and trouble us no more; we on our part should undertake to keep them supplied with food and other necessaries. [...] A formal treaty [was] signed. (Samuel 1942: 44)

This is known as the ‘great separation’. Fortunately there were no indigenous populations on these small islands, so it was never an inhabited place but instead a pure empty space ripe for colonization and suitable for the transferral of populations, as imagined by all expansionist empires. The smaller islands are lands without people, waiting for a people who want a new land, to adapt the famous and disputed phrase used by Zionists and, initially, in fact, Christian Zionists, such as Anthony Ashley-Cooper. (Clark 2007: 152) The Bensals’ hands are clean. The islanders are entirely responsible for their condition: first, for not choosing suturization and, second, for handily choosing self-determination through mass emigration.

The islands develop distinct political systems, which correspond, in a satirical digression on Samuel’s part, to the USSR (Ulmia), Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy (Mina and Misa), Britain and France (Wina and Wisa). Inevitably the less intelligent gradually regress yet further, and, on their separate islands, come to be continually at war with each other. They are initially less intelligent not by virtue of race - there is no racist rationale – but just by chance. They make technophobic choices and then fail to evolve through acquiring and passing on positive characteristics. This however

points forward towards a racially framed degeneracy. These are the chief targets of satire in the book, as Samuel diagnoses the problems (which are European problems, of course) that will lead to inevitable conflict. They contrast markedly with the wisdom of those on Bensalem. We infer from this satire that the political systems of Europe are a result of sub-optimally intelligent populations who have made bad choices. A classically liberal ethos shines through – humans are in control of their own condition and therefore only have themselves to blame if things go wrong. It is a sign of his progressive liberalism that he will take sides against those who reject modernization, here present in the guise of medical experiments, existing alongside several other forms of technological progress.

Satire and irony

But are the Bensals themselves being satirized, as well as the inhabitants of the smaller islands? Are we allowed to read irony within Samuel's attitude towards Bensalem? What about the absurd process of 'suturization'? Samuel's narrator nowhere suggests we should follow suit. Isn't it a satire of mechanistic solutions to human problems, targeting madly invasive eugenics, but therefore also the very basis of Bensalem's success? And if so, what about the oh-so-easy, all-too-easy solution of voluntary partition chosen by the Small-Head league? Partition had already had disastrous consequences in Ireland – is it being mockingly reduced here through a *reductio ad absurdum*?

You might expect some scepticism since Samuel was so hostile to the partition plans of, first, the Peel and then the Woodhead Commissions, just as he also strongly influenced the one-state solution of the 1939 White Paper, arguing always that a form of coexistence needed to be found. All of these political events were unfolding as he

drafted *An Unknown Land*. In the long run, Samuel's opposition to every partition proposal from 1937 onwards was successful. And yet partition is a crucial part of Bensalem's success, the solution to the problem of its specific form of sectarianism.

Ultimately I would suggest there is no irony here, no satire. The clearest satirical targets are the European political systems on the islands. Partition is necessary to the narrative for its satire, a ruse to produce difference in the people. Bensalem is the idealized alternative. In general, the intelligence of the Bensals is celebrated everywhere. Suturization is the catalyst for the augmentation of that intelligence. Samuel shared the gently puritan cultural tastes of the Bensals. The structure of the society depends on the 'great separation', on the exclusionary arrangements and on deals with the islands that guarantee peace, just as much as it depends on free sustainable energy. Following the way the narrative unfolds, Samuel champions those who see the better path and approve of it. Even if we would never follow their processes literally, the condition of the Bensals is supposed to provide 'hope' as an example: the function of his fiction, as we have seen, is to give strength through hope. This 'liberal-plus-welfare-state-vision', as Wendehorst describes it, is wartime war-aims Utopianism (Wendehorst 2012: 136). Irony is indeed a casualty in such discourse.

There is above all no *conscious* irony or satire, and this is because Samuel is not fully in control of his own material, as he said in his memoirs: 'it was an amusing kind of book to write; one is no longer tied to facts; there is a pleasant feeling of irresponsibility, and room for all kinds of guesses and speculations' (1945: 291). Writing his Utopia was a release from the responsibility and the intentionality of politics. Samuel does not know what he is doing with his unknown land, which lies imaginatively far away, beyond the grasp of irony's conscious techniques. This,

however, *also* opens up the possibility of the novel being an expression of a political unconscious – and the politically unconscionable.

The Great Separation is an ideal version of the imperialist imaginary that solves conflict by arranging people on the surface of the globe in a process that is as rationalized as the storage and distribution of the commodities that Empire hopes to trade to its advantage. Tidiness is key in the imaginations of totalitarian administrative power. Samuel disliked the Peel Commission because, in his eyes, it was a mess. The tidy solution, he thought, was a single state, with a degree of local administrative power devolved to separate communities defined along religious grounds, but all managed from afar by the British.

In *An Unknown Land*, Utopia is protected and extended through an idealized account of migration: an aggrieved population does the sensible thing and leaves its own homeland for another. Those who remain are sensible modernizers. As an expression of a political unconscious, it is more than mere wish-fulfilment solving sectarianism: it is easy enough to see that the two sides of the Great Separation represent tradition and modernity. It is then not difficult to project traditionalism onto the Palestinian Arabs (rural, rooted in the local and established practices, those who are forced to respond to the impact of modernity) and modernity onto the Jewish migrants who were actively modernizing, transforming and improving, in Samuel's account, the parts of Palestine in which they settled, as we will see.

Samuel's *political* wish, expressed in the House of Lords and elsewhere, was that the Jews and Arabs needed to learn to live together under a temporary British administration (as they had done, more or less, when he had been the High Commissioner), before becoming an independent multicultural state. It is no surprise

that Ben-Gurion, planning more clearly the establishment of a Jewish state, did not want him at the 1939 London Conference, and he was in fact not present at the discussion.

Samuel's *imagined* wish, expressed in *An Unknown Land*, is that the less intelligent should know when they are beaten, and elect to leave their homes to avoid further conflict. This solution is entirely in line with common-sense liberalism, since the less powerful are not being forced to do something, and what they are doing is in the interests of the majority. In the context of Palestine, this is the suppressed ideal, the impossible dream that Samuel is playing out in his fiction, an expression of his political unconscious, his blind spot, produced by a Utopian Zionism.

The Utopian strain in his Zionism is something we have already encountered in his conversation with Lord Grey in 1914. It is still clear in his pride in 'the Jewish spirit', expressed cautiously when resisting the 1938 Woodhead Commission:

if simultaneously we can in Palestine foster the growth of a Jewish centre in which the moral, intellectual and practical Jewish spirit, which history shows is a thing not to be despised, can flourish and can radiate among millions of Jews, dispersed throughout the world, a stimulus and a hope, then in this and in the coming generations, the British Commonwealth may achieve new elements of greatness and render yet further services to mankind. (Hansard: HL Deb 08 Dec 1938, vol 111, col 431)

The practical Jewish spirit will contribute to British imperialist ends. At exactly this time, Samuel is also imagining and writing about a flourishing moral, intellectual and practical spirit in Bensalem, a model for Post-war reconstruction.

Samuel's *Memoirs* – begun shortly after the publication of *An Unknown Land* – continue the idealization of the Zionist project. Defensively he maintains the original dreams, justifying his time as the founding administrator of a nascent state: 'We had to build, from the very beginning, a modern state' (Samuel 1945: 161). Memories of the early Jewish settlements appear through rose-tinted spectacles, his imagery borrowing from the Utopia he has just completed, and conforming to the Fabian socialist dreams of an anti-industrialist form of self-sufficiency, out of William Morris's *News from Nowhere*:

Memories of many visits to Jewish agricultural settlements form a composite picture – wide roads, bordered by little white single-storied houses well-spaced out, with creepers over their porches; around them little gardens of flowers and patches of vegetables, with fields of waving corn and young plantations of trees beyond; groups of men and women in working-clothes, smiling girls, and beautiful healthy white-dressed children; overhead the cloudless blue sky. They were a happy population, with good reason to be happy – an intelligent, well-educated peasantry, close to the soil, working with a purpose. (Samuel 1945: 176)

It is tragic to read with hindsight Samuel's realization on his first visit to Palestine in 1920 'that the Zionists have not recognised the force and value of the Arab nationalist movement' (Huneidi 2001: 35) and that, as Samuel puts it, 'the present Zionist Commission has the irritating effect of an alien body in living flesh. I fear it is too late now to get the confidence of the Arabs' (Reynold 2001: 8). Indeed, the jinni – on both sides – was out of the bottle, uncontrollable.

Clinging to the Utopian imaginary he had just crafted in *An Unknown Land*, Samuel reproduces the signs of enlightened progress in his *Memoirs*:

In 1920 the number of Jewish villages was 45, with a population of about 15,000; now there are 276, and the population is 150,000. The town of Tel Aviv, when I first saw it, had 8,000 people; to-day it has 200,000. A great variety of industries have been established in Tel Aviv, in Haifa and elsewhere. Electric supply, previously non-existent, now covers the whole country and provides about 200 million kilowatt-hours a year for industry, irrigation and domestic use. Owing mainly to these developments, the Government revenue every month is equal to that of a year in my time. In the cultural field – especially in science, music and drama – the Jewish National Home has made an admirable beginning. The young University [... etc.] (1945)

For Samuel, the function of ‘mere Utopias’ is to give hope. For criticism, the function of ‘Utopias’ is more often to present pathways into the political unconscious, where looking through their idealisms reveals the shape of pragmatism’s underbelly. The localized unitary Utopia where benign equality reigns turns out to be a nationalist screen concealing a broad global Dystopia of diverse and unequal realms.

In his popular *Book of Quotations*, Samuel recorded the saying ‘The world is like a mirror: frown at it and it frowns at you: smile, and it smiles too’ (Bowle 1957: 335–36). This popular phrase, with its glib and solipsistic logic, can be undone easily enough by remembering that the person smiling or frowning at the

so-called mirror of the world exists in a world that, far from being a mirror, in actuality spreads out all around. Gazing at a mirror, the reflective person has turned their eyes from the actual world around them, to see a reflection of themselves as if that is the world, and the world is them. But what they see will inevitably include glimpses of what they think they have excluded. It is not so easy to partition off the world. So the actual world – at least parts of it – will be reflected too, its condition perhaps obscure, but existing independently of the mood of the observer. It may be yawning, scowling or begging, or grinning madly, and, for all that the reflective person knows, it may be vengefully concealing a knife. The exclusion of the world from one's own context is the exclusionary gesture of Utopia that believes one can project an image of the world from an idealized version of oneself.

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Wendehorst, Stephan E. C. (2012), *British Jewry, Zionism, and the Jewish State, 1936-1956*. Oxford : Oxford University Press.

Contributor details. Finn Fordham is Professor of 20th Century Literature at Royal Holloway. He is a specialist in the life and works of James Joyce, genetic criticism, and archivally informed approaches to literature. As well as numerous articles, he has written two books, edited three volumes of essays, and edited *Finnegans Wake* for Oxford World Classics. He is currently at work on a study of culture on a single day – the day Britain and France declared war on Germany, 3rd September 1939.

Contact: Department of English; Royal Holloway, University of London; Egham, TW20 0EX

E-mail: finn.fordham@rhul.ac.uk